

Walking...Standing...Sitting

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[0 : 00] It's really good to be here. I want to kind of change gears a little bit from what I was expecting to say, and I just want to acknowledge, it sounds like it's maybe a tough season right now in this church.

Hearing what Shelby and the loss of Shelby, that sounds heartbreaking and devastating. And I come in, you know, ready to be rah-rah, camp, everything is awesome, and I don't think that's necessarily the right thing because maybe it doesn't feel like everything is awesome right now. Speaking of it before, I just hear there's some hard, just hard conversations that the church is having speaking about the future. I know I feel that as I try and navigate the camp, as you might be completely unaware of this, through rough denominational waters right now as we try and navigate that.

I grew up going to First Baptist Church, so a CBWC church, one of your sister churches, in Red Deer, so First Baptist Church in Red Deer. And many, many times Sundays had this many people. We went from like 120 people, which is still a small church, but that was great, 120 people, and then down to like 22, 25, 27. If we hit 30, it was like, yeah.

[1 : 19] And then it slowly came back. And at the camp, so the camp's been around for 103 years. Founded in 1920. Amazing.

I went to the camp in the 90s. I thought it was awesome, but it was falling apart. It was held up by cinder blocks and duct tape.

For about five or six years, every single board meeting, the question was raised, are we done? Should we shut it down? Is this the end of it?

Is this the final meeting where we make that decision? And somehow, for years, they just, no, no. A little bit further. A little bit further.

A little bit further. And then eventually, in 2004, some people got together and they said, look, this is it. We either shut it down, or we need to kind of revision and reinvest.

[2 : 20] And they decided that that's what they were going to do. And it took a handful of people. And now, so then I started in 2007. So I've been there 16 years. And we've rebuilt just about all the buildings.

And we're serving well over 1,000 kids each summer now. And your church is part of that success story. Your church is one of the many contributing churches that helped bring us out of the depths and continue on.

And I'm not saying that that was the right path for every camp. There's a lot of camps that are going through hard times right now. And I know there's a lot of churches going through hard times right now as well. But I understand if it's a tough season.

And I understand if it's a discouraging season. And that's okay. It's okay for it to be tough. It's okay for it to be discouraging sometimes. And we'll see what God has in store.

Right? Who knows? Who knows what tomorrow brings? I'm going to talk a bit about... I'm going to preach on Psalm chapter 1.

[3 : 23] And we'll get to that in a second. But something I've really been noticing lately that also adds burden to my life, and maybe to yours as well, is how much culture has shifted over the last...

I'm going to say 15 years. But how much things have changed the last three years. Right? We've had this COVID. I don't want to blame everything on COVID. But I want to bring it up because it's like, oh, enough, enough, enough, enough, enough. But let's not just pretend that there isn't a cloud that kind of hangs over everything.

There's this extra stress that we've been carrying for three years. And that just makes it hard. So today, I just want to acknowledge that that's happening. It's there. It's real. And I see you.

And I'm very thankful to be here with you this morning. I feel like it's time to pray again. I know you pray. That was a beautiful prayer. But I would never have enough. Holy God, I thank you for today. God, I thank you for this congregation.

Pray a blessing on them as they go. God, you are a good God. It's good to be here with you today. We pray this in the holy name of Jesus. Amen. One thing I will say.

[4 : 28] Growing up in Red Deer, at a small church, holy cats, I got to do whatever I wanted. I was like 15 years old, and I had a key to the church. 15! It was amazing.

My youth group was me and my best friend, also named Steve. So Steve just went to church, and we like had a projector. And this is like 90s, right? It's like a projector with a big screen. It was unbelievable.

So we would just come to church, and we'd play video games, like ourselves, the two of us, because we both had keys to church, and we were 15 and 16 years old. That's crazy. But if you look at church studies, and engaging youth in lifelong church membership, giving young people real responsibility and real leadership early is a great way to keep them in.

So there's a few young faces in here. The more leadership you give them, the longer they're going to be part of it. So I was very thankful to grow up in a small church, because I got to preach for the first time when I was 17 years old.

Who does that? It was terrible. No, I don't know. I'm sure it was fine. I had help with my pastor. So yeah, there may be significant blessing in this season that you're in.

[5 : 43] But anyways, Hells of Lugable Camp. I'm going to kind of skip most of my camp talk, but if you've got kids, if you've got grandkids, if you've got neighbors who have kids, camp is amazing. Especially coming out of this really difficult time of COVID, where we kind of stopped being able to be around people, right?

It was like, everybody out there was trying to kill me with a handshake, right? Like, you couldn't interact, you couldn't do it. Schools, it was just tough. But, and I was mentioning, this is longer than just the three years of COVID.

So I'm 40 years old. I grew up with no internet, no cell phone. That was not part of my, you know, childhood up until as an adult.

I have four kids. 16, 14, 11, and 9. None of them have lived a day without the internet and without cell phones.

They are used to being always connected, always wired in, right? Always engaged, always entertained. And then you have COVID hit, and now all their engagement even more focuses on these little tiny devices, right?

[6 : 56] Whether it's a phone or a computer or whatever. And at camp, we get to kind of re-flip that. For a week, kids get to come, and there's no screens allowed.

There's no phones. You're not allowed to bring your phone. Our leaders don't have phones. Our campers don't have phones. No phones. My daughter, who's 16, is a leader in training. So she was at camp six weeks last summer.

Six weeks, no phone. It was like I got my kid back. And I'm not trying to, like, slam on technology. I use my phone all the time. I quite appreciate having it. I don't go six weeks without a phone, right? But for my kid, oh, I'm super stoked that she went six weeks without her phone. So that's one of the big things, one of the big blessings of camp. You get to come. You get to be real relationship with real people in front of you in real time.

And that's something that's pretty cool. We do kids, grandkids, neighbors' kids, nieces, nephews. Camp is a really cool place. Our mission is to create space for campers to connect with Christ.

[7 : 54] We don't get to create those connections. That's not our job. That's between the Holy Spirit and the camp themselves. But what we try and do is create this fertile space, this thin space where the noise, well, the noise is loud, but the distractive noise is quiet, where kids get to come and be in relationship, where they get to connect with each other and with Christ.

And that's what we've been doing for 100 years, and I'm thankful for this church, for the many, many, many generations of partnership as we serve our Lord together. So thank you for that. A good friend and a mentor of mine told me a few years ago that he actually believes that camp will be more important tomorrow than it was yesterday.

And at first, I did not believe him because I've seen how much good has happened at camp for the last 100 years. As I said, I came to camp in the 90s. I came to Christ at camp.

What could be more important than that, right? That happened yesterday. That's the pinnacle. No, I'm just kidding. But as I've said, I've seen our culture shift and change, and I think the camp experience is going to be more and more and more and more important as we go here because camp is just a special place.

As I was talking, or as I mentioned, my daughter went six weeks with her cell phone. That's amazing. My 14-year-old son hasn't got a cell phone yet, right?

[9 : 18] My daughter hit kind of cell phone age. At the beginning of COVID, she needed to connect with her friends. It was the only way to stay connected. My 14-year-old is just there now. My 11- and my 9-year-olds, they've got Chromebooks for school and things like that.

We're at an interesting stage as a family where we're trying to navigate this now. And there's no roadmap. There's no blueprint for this, right? Nobody has navigated this successfully because we don't have the data.

It's all new stuff. But I think it's really easy for me to look at my kids and kind of wag my finger and, you know, you really should not be on your phone so much.

Or I like try and set limits and things like that. But here's the thing. I have a cell phone. And I don't have limits for myself. I'm not taking six weeks off in the summer to be without it.

I might go a couple days if I go on like a camping trip or something like that and I'm out of service. But that's about it. And I find that I'm using my phone as much as my teenage daughter is, especially over the last few years with COVID.

[10 : 20] And again, I don't want to dwell on COVID, but I'm different now than I was three years ago. I'm starting to see it in my life and I don't like it. I don't go out as much as I used to. I don't volunteer as much as I used to.

I'm certainly more anxious and moody. I find that I'm often choosing to do nothing other than just sit at home by myself, maybe even like around, like my family's all there, but we're all in our own little worlds, right?

One might be watching Netflix. I'm on my phone. My wife is on her phone. It's terrible. Even just like admitting it out loud. I'm like, oh, I'm super embarrassed by that actually. I'm like, oh, I can't believe I admitted that to you.

That yeah, that's what we do is just sit and do that. But it's way too true. If I'm stressed or bored or tired or upset, I'm perfectly content just to sit on my phone or computer or Netflix or whatever and just zone out.

Mindlessly consuming whatever I scroll through next. And COVID has been a convenient excuse for me to be more anxious, to be more moody, to be more closed off. But it's done now.

[11 : 20] It's done. But I continue to have a hard time being who I want to be. And I kind of had to like pull myself aside a few months ago and have a little talk with myself because I've become someone I didn't want to be.

And I saw myself digging a deeper and deeper and deeper rut. And honestly, I'm still not out of that rut. I'm working through it week to week, day to day, sometimes minute to minute to make choices that lead to who I want to be.

And it's a real struggle for me. It's taken me a long time. It took me years to get into that rut. It's taken me more than I would like to get me out of that rut. And that leads me to the scripture for today. It's one of my absolute favorite passages.

This is Psalm 1, first Psalm. Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers. Not so the wicked.

[12 : 31] They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

I love this passage. It's one of my favorite chapters in the whole Bible. It's poetic, right? It's full of imagery. But it's also very clear.

And it's inspiring to me. And there's two distinct images here. There's the way of the wicked and the sinner and the way of the blessed and the righteous. And in my life, I weave all over this passage.

I regretfully find myself right there with the wicked and the sinner sometimes. And I delightfully find myself with the blessed and the righteous sometimes.

Sometimes in the same day. More often for me, I find myself kind of oscillating in longer seasons of weeks or months. And it feels more like a wave pattern. It starts with me doing really well, right?

[13:31] I'm right there with Jesus. My prayer life is great. I feel so connected to God. I'm kind to others. I'm generous. I'm patient. The fruit of the Spirit is evident in my life.

Like I walk outside and birds just like land on my shoulders, right? Like it's just like, oh, it's perfect. Not so much that part. But the rest is true. I feel properly secured in the Lord.

I feel that whatever happens that day, God is with me and he's guiding me. The stresses don't affect me so much because I know who I am. I know who the Lord is.

And I know that I'm his humble servant walking the path set before me. And I love those seasons. Those waves are amazing. During camp season, I am up early to have my prayer meditation on with God because I need to.

I completely need God to guide and protect me in the camp. It is way too important to leave it just to me. But then camp ends. Fall begins. And there's the same urgency and need.

[14:32] My routine changes. I don't have the same daily conversation with God asking for the things I need that day and asking for guidance and grace. I start doing things in my own power without turning to God first.

Then I start faltering. Then I pick up some bad habits. And I find myself in a place I don't want to be, usually on my phone. Part of being in seasonal ministry is that there's a very busy season and then there's a down season.

And I generally love that. I love the season of long days and hard work. And I love the season of rest and renewal and Sabbath. But at some point in the off season, I realize I'm not living how I want to live.

I'm not anchored in Christ as securely as I would like. I'm feeling the stress and the weight of life. And I need to repent. Literally repent. Which means to turn and put down the bad habits and remember who I want to be and how to do that.

Now, I wonder if I'm alone in this. It's like, huh, any nods out there? If I am, if I'm alone, you're like, no, no relation whatsoever.

[15:42] Well, I'm going to waste the next few minutes of your life. But if not, and you might be able to relate with this, I've got good news and I've got better news.

The good news is that this is really the rhythm and story of God's people in the Bible. The Bible is just story after story after story of closeness and intimacy with God.

And then disobedience. And then separation. And then repentance. And then restoration. Then incredible relationship. And the story repeats on and on and on. Like right at the beginning. Right at the beginning.

First, like three pages. Depending on how big your pages are. First two chapters. We have creation. Right? We have Adam and Eve.

In the garden. There's this incredible relationship. Right? They're walking with God. Incredible closeness. Intimacy. And then there's disobedience. There's separation.

[16:39] Then there's repentance and restoration. For another simple and clear example, look at the Israelites. Right? The Israelites, they cry out from their slavery. Cry out from their slavery in Egypt.

And God rescues them. It's amazing. Thank God. There's this Passover. There's this super close intimacy with God. Tight relationship. Then they start complaining.

And before you know it, they're building golden isles to false gods. Right? It's like, it's just, it's these waves of like amazing example. And then they blow it.

And then amazing example. And then they blow it. Over and over and over again. And there are stories that follow the similar pattern all throughout the Bible. So, if you have fallen into this path, you are not alone.

But, just because it happened in the Bible doesn't mean it's a good thing and the ideal. In fact, the Bible is clear that this is not the ideal. And I brought these two examples here. And I noticed something in these stories that I also noticed in Psalm 1, which I read just a bit before.

[17:42] There's this progression. And I won't take too much time and get into the specific details, but there's a progression here. They all start off well, right? Then, there's an element of doubt.

Doubt enters the scene.

Where they wonder if everything they were told is really the only way. Like for Adam and Eve, the serpent plants a seed of doubt in their minds.

For the Israelites, hunger and tiredness make them doubt. If God is really guiding them, then we move from doubt and we have this shift to distrust.

Adam and Eve stop trusting God. They stop trusting that God wants what's best for them. Why would he not want them to have knowledge? What is he hiding? Right? Distrust.

The Israelites didn't trust that God was going to protect them in the desert. At least the Egyptians protected them. They fed them. What's God doing? They don't trust. He was taking too long with Moses up on this mountain and they were afraid.

[18 : 44] This led to disobedience. Adam and Eve didn't trust that God wanted what was best for them. So they broke the only rule in the garden. They disobeyed and ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The Israelites didn't trust that God was enough. So they built a false God to worship in his place. They disobeyed by turning to another God.

Doubt. Mel luxe. Philosopher's sitting. Right? Do you see that progression?

Because if you're walking, let's say you're walking with somebody, right? And suddenly you don't like what they're saying. Well, that's easy. You just start walking in another direction, right? I've got inertia, you've got inertia, maybe we're going the same way, but I'm just going to veer off. Don't like that anymore.

Now let's say you're walking with somebody and now you're stopped. You ever be in conversation with somebody, maybe at church, and you're like, man, I am stuck with this person for a while. Like, how do I get out of this conversation? There's a different gravity to standing, right? Walking, I can change paths, I'm light on my feet, I'm nimble. When you're standing, you're there. You're grounded.

[20 : 24] But then we get further in the progression, right? You walk, then you stand, and then you sit. And when you sit, you're in it.

It's much more challenging to get up and to get moving and to get away from this spot when you're sitting than if you're already walking or even if you're standing or ideally if you ever even came to this spot in the first place.

So my question for myself, because this sermon's really for me, to be honest with you, but I'll let you in on it, is where are you stuck? Where have you sat with mockers?

Where are you walking with the wicked? Where are you standing in sin? And is this what you want? Do you want to be sitting where you're sitting? Not literally, figuratively.

I found this progression in my life, especially over the past few years, like I said. And no singular action was a cause or was even necessarily bad, right?

[21 : 30] But it progressed and it built up. I was stressed. My rhythm changed. I lost my good habits and I started flirting with bad habits. I had doubt that God knew what was best for me.

I had distrust that he could take care of all my needs. And I disobeyed by looking for other ways to ease my anxiety or my worry or my stress.

I was careless as I turned to escape, distraction, isolation. And it led me to walk, stand, and even sit here and sit. Now, we all know that people we spend time with have huge influence in our lives, right?

I work at camp. One of the things that I talk about most with our teens and our young adults is who are you spending time with? Who are your friends, right? You want to know your future? Show me who you're hanging out with right now.

This psalm literally talks about walking, standing, or sitting with people who influence us. This is most certainly true. But now, in an ever-connected culture and world and society, there's an extra layer of media on top of this.

[22 : 36] Are you spending time with people who are wicked, sinners, or mockers? Or how about in your media? Are you consuming and spending time absorbing images, ideas, or comments that are wicked, sinful, or mocking?

Is there an area in your life where you're walking with the wicked, or standing with sinners, or sitting with mockers? Have you gotten stuck? Because it's tough to get unstuck.

As I said, there's some good news. And that is that your story is echoed through the Bible. But, there's even better news, the real good news. And that is that Jesus is here.

Right? So we have Jesus. And Jesus came for the lost. He came for the stuck. He came for the sheep that wandered, that maybe stood, and maybe sat somewhere that it was not supposed to be. When I'm doing well and living a healthy life full of connection with Christ and others, Jesus is pumped. He's stoked. He's so excited. I'm living in the kingdom as it is here on earth, and Jesus is thrilled with that.

[23 : 52] But when I stray and I falter and I disobey, Jesus is there waiting for me to turn and trust him to restore me to health. And when I do, when I repent of my sin and my disobedience, Christ celebrates.

Right? He is pumped. So excited. So again, this sermon's for me. As I've been preparing this over the last, honestly, several months, do I need to pause and turn to Jesus for him to come and rescue me?

The answer is absolutely yes. But I share that with you. Is there anything that you need to pause and turn to Jesus in for him to come and rescue you? But now the second part of the psalm.

But whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night, that person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever they do prospers. how badly I want to be like that tree planted by the stream who produces fruit in season, whose leaf does not wilt.

[24 : 58] I cannot think of any image more pleasant and more desirable than that. I want that. I want that for myself. I want it for my kids, for my friends, for the campers at camp.

I want it for you. How wonderful would it be if we all had that sense of being a tree planted by a stream? Now the psalm tells us how to make this happen. The one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on his law day and night.

Again, a question for myself but I'll share it with you. Are you meditating on scripture? I know that sounds so trite, so cliché, right? Like, oh, you're having a tough time? Read your Bible.

Like, oh, you're separated from God? Read your Bible. It's like, yeah, sometimes we, it doesn't feel like it's actually helpful advice. But what if you started there?

I know how I feel when I'm in full relationship with God and it really does feel what I imagine a tree feels like when they're planted in good soil by a cool stream.

[26 : 03] I love that feeling and I want it in my life all the time. I know I'm a better, happier version of myself when I'm connected with Christ. And for me, it actually does start with Bible reading and with prayer.

Reading the Word of God and then talking with Him about it. I was at a ministerial meeting and somebody kind of half joking, I don't think it was them, they were maybe quoting somebody else, and this is a pastor saying, I don't even read the Bible anymore.

I read books about the Bible more than I read the Bible. And I was like, oh, yeah, that's really true. I think I'm in that place too where it's like, oh, I do all this study but it's like, what about just the Word? What about just the Word? For me, this isn't a should, as in, I should do this. For me, this is a want. I want to do this. And yet, even in that wanting, it's still a challenge for me. I go in and out of seasons reading my Bible consistently. So, I try to make it easy. I look to make it enjoyable as something I look forward to.

[27 : 06] I know that reading my Bible is good for me, but can I make it enjoyable so it doesn't feel like a chore. Reading the Bible should not feel like a chore. Just like for runners, running doesn't feel like a chore, but for most of us, it does.

Or for gardeners, right, gardening doesn't feel like a chore, but for me, it definitely does. Bible reading, running, and gardening are all activities that are a joy which produce good fruit.

But for many, it feels like a chore. So how do we turn into a joy? And I'm just about done here. Well, first thing, if this is a struggle for any of you, let's start small.

And maybe, maybe for you, because I see people that have probably been here for decades, you know, like, I haven't missed a day reading my Bible in 9,000 days. Amazing!

That's wonderful. But maybe you've got kids, grandkids, somebody that you might get to encourage or mentor along the way. It's hard to start.

[28 : 09] It's hard to develop a habit, especially a good habit. So, start small. Here's two things that I've done that help me. What would be enjoyable for me?

So this is a couple years ago, I started reading a book of the Bible in one sitting every weekend. I didn't force myself to read during the week, but on the weekend, usually Saturday, I would sit down with a cup of tea in my favorite chair, and I'd read one book of the Bible in one shot.

So it was like reading a story, and it was awesome. And, some of these are short. So it was like, oh, I don't have a lot of time? No problem. You know, like, Jude, here we go.

Jonah, here we go. It's like, eight minutes, done. Other times, it's like, I got all day. Genesis, holy cats. Like, Leviticus, yes. It's like a slasher.

Yeah, if you're into, like, blood and guts, Leviticus. No judgment. And so I did that for a while, and it was wonderful. I really, like, genuinely looked forward to it. And then, ironically, in COVID, where I actually had more time, it was like, my rhythm fell apart, because, like, days of the week didn't matter anymore, right?

[29 : 21] So I was like, oh, I don't know if it's Saturday. But now, for Lent, I've committed to reading one chapter of a gospel each day. That's it. And I don't allow myself to read more.

It's like, no, just one. That's it. And I've started looking forward to it, because I love reading the stories of Jesus. I don't, I'm not even necessarily going in order. I started in Luke, and I'm just like, which one has the most red letters in it?

And I start there. I just want to read about Jesus, because I love Jesus, and I love reading the stories of Jesus. So, if you're in your Bible, it's a struggle for you. What do you enjoy? What would make it easy?

Maybe it's the classic Old Testament, like David and Goliath. Maybe you're really into blood and guts. Maybe it's Leviticus. Maybe you're into really, like, rules, or numbers, or counting, or things like that. So it's Old Testament. Maybe it's just stories.

Maybe it's the wisdom, right? It's Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. What would you be excited to go read? Start there. Because it takes a while to develop a habit, and that's okay.

[30 : 22] So try a few approaches to it, and if you've missed some, that's fine. I haven't hit every day of Lent. I've missed some days. So be it. I'm going to start again. I'll start again today. Start again tomorrow.

Whatever it takes. 80% and done is way better than waiting for 100%. Just like there's a progression of bad habits, there can be a progression of good habits too.

So let's try walking with the Bible, right? And then maybe let's stand with the Bible and then sit in the Bible. I'm just going to bring back to camp here really quick to end.

This is what we try and do at camp. We introduce campers to Jesus and some good friends and some good role models. We model a healthy life where they can be like trees planted by streams of water. We show them how to delight in the law of the Lord.

And I hope that you can be the same. That if you find yourself walking, standing, or sitting with people or behaviors or habits that are not serving you well, that you will repent.

[31 : 25] That you'll turn to Jesus and turn to other people and behaviors and habits and start walking, standing, and sitting with them. And when in doubt, start by reading the Bible.